

# FHS Knowledge and Reality: Syllabus

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## Course Description

*The purpose of this subject is to enable you to examine some central questions about the nature of the world and the extent to which we can have knowledge of it.*

*In considering knowledge you will examine whether it is possible to attain knowledge of what the world is really like. Is our knowledge of the world necessarily limited to what we can observe to be the case? Indeed, are even our observational beliefs about the world around us justified? Can we have knowledge of what will happen based on what has happened? Is our understanding of the world necessarily limited to what we can prove to be the case? Or can we understand claims about the remote past or distant future which we cannot in principle prove to be true?*

*In considering reality you will focus on questions such as the following. Does the world really contain the three-dimensional objects and their properties — such as red buses or black horses — which we appear to encounter in everyday life? Or is it made up rather of the somewhat different entities studied by science, such as colourless atoms or four-dimensional space-time worms? What is the relation between the common sense picture of the world and that provided by contemporary science? Is it correct to think of the objects and their properties that make up the world as being what they are independently of our preferred ways of dividing up reality?*

## How to use this syllabus

This syllabus contains 16 topics. Each topic has an essay question, plus core and further readings. If you are taking the full course, we will usually choose eight of these topics together and decide on their order. Each week, you will then need to complete the core readings and a tutorial essay on that week's essay question. Your tutorial essay should normally be around 1,500 to 2,000 words, but there is no minimum word requirement: the 1,500 to 2,000 figure is an indication of how much *content* you should cover in your essay. If you can cover enough content using fewer words, that's great!

## Other useful materials

You can find a guide to writing tutorial essays [here](#). You can find a brief guide to getting the most out of your tutorials [here](#). Various other resources (probably including a link to this syllabus!) can be found [here](#).

## Other information

I have tried to ensure that most things listed here (especially the core readings) are available online through SOLO, but this isn't always possible. If you are unable to access any of the readings through the library (online and physical), you should contact me. You should also email me if you need anything else, or have any questions about the course.

You can reach me at [tomi.francis@philosophy.ox.ac.uk](mailto:tomi.francis@philosophy.ox.ac.uk).

# EPISTEMOLOGY

## Topic 1: The Analysis of Knowledge

### Essay Question

*Is it possible to give an informative conceptual analysis of knowledge?*

### Core Readings

Edmund L. Gettier (1963). “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” In: *Analysis* 23.6, pp. 121–123

Linda Zagzebski (1994). “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems”. In: *The Philosophical Quarterly* 44.174, pp. 65–73

### Optional Readings

Michael Blome-Tillmann (2007). “The Folly of Trying to Define Knowledge”. In: *Analysis* 67.295, pp. 214–219

Stephen Kearns (2007). “In Praise of Folly: A Reply to Blome-Tillmann”. In: *Analysis* 67.295, pp. 219–222

Chapters 1 and 2 of Timothy Williamson (2000). *Knowledge and Its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

## Topic 2: Scepticism I: Proof of an External World

### Essay Question

*Can we prove that there is an external world? Do we need to?*

### Core Readings

René Descartes (1641). *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 1

Peter Unger (1971). “A Defense of Skepticism”. In: *The Philosophical Review* 80.2, pp. 198–219

### Optional Readings

Chapter VII, “Proof of an External World”, in G.E. Moore (1959). *Philosophical Papers*. London: Allen & Unwin

James Pryor (2000). “The Skeptic and the Dogmatist”. In: *Noûs* 34.4, pp. 517–549

Hilary Putnam (1981). *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Chapter 8 of Timothy Williamson (2000). *Knowledge and Its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

## Topic 3: Scepticism II: Contextualism

### Essay Question

*Does contextualism solve the problem of scepticism?*

## Core Readings

Michael Blome-Tillmann (2018). “Skepticism and Contextualism”. In: *Skepticism: from Antiquity to the Present*. Ed. by Diego E. Machuca and Baron Reed. London: Bloomsbury Academic. Chap. 43, pp. 620–633

David Lewis (1996). “Elusive Knowledge”. In: *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74.4, pp. 549–567

## Optional Readings

Jennifer Nagel (2010). “Knowledge Ascriptions and the Psychological Consequences of thinking about Error”. In: *The Philosophical Quarterly* 60.239, pp. 286–306

Keith DeRose (1995). “Solving the Skeptical Problem”. In: *The Philosophical Review* 104.1, pp. 1–52

Jessica Brown (2016). “Contextualism About Evidential Support”. In: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 92.2, pp. 329–354

## Topic 4: Closure

### Essay Question

*If you know that several propositions which you know to be true together entail P, are you always in a position to know that P?*

## Core Readings

Fred Dretske (2013). “Is Knowledge Closed Under Known Entailment?” In: *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*. Ed. by Matthias Steup, John Turri, and Ernest Sosa. 2nd ed. Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated. Chap. 2 (part 1), pp. 27–40

John Hawthorne (2013). “The Case for Closure”. In: *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*. Ed. by Matthias Steup, John Turri, and Ernest Sosa. 2nd ed. Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated. Chap. 2 (part 2), pp. 40–56

## Optional Readings

Chapter 10, Knowledge and Skepticism, in Robert Nozick (1981). *Philosophical Explanations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press

D.C. Makinson (1965). “The Paradox of the Preface”. In: *Analysis* 25.6, pp. 205–207

Peter Murphy (2005). “Closure Failures for Safety”. In: *Philosophia* 33.1–4, pp. 331–334

Anthony L. Brueckner (1985). “Skepticism and Epistemic Closure”. In: *Philosophical Topics* 13.3, pp. 89–117

Richard Feldman (1995). “In Defence of Closure”. In: *The Philosophical Quarterly* 45.181, pp. 487–494

Robert Audi (1995). “Deductive Closure, Defeasibility and Scepticism: A Reply to Feldman”. In: *The Philosophical Quarterly* 45.181, pp. 494–499

## Topic 5: The Problem of Induction

### Essay Question

*Under what conditions, if any, are we justified in believing that past regularities will continue to hold in the future?*

### Core Readings

Section IV of David Hume (2020 [1748]). *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. by Peter Millican. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Chapter 3 of Nelson Goodman (1955). *Fact, Fiction, and Forecasting*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

### Optional Readings

Michael Anthony Slote (1967). "Some Thoughts on Goodman's Riddle". In: *Analysis* 27.4, pp. 128–132

James Van Cleve (1984). "Reliability, Justification, and the Problem of Induction". In: *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 9.1, pp. 555–567

Laurence Bonjour (1997). *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of A Priori Justification*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

## Topic 6: Luminosity

### Essay Question

*Can you feel cold without being in a position to know that you feel cold?*

### Core Readings

Selim Berker (2008). "Luminosity Regained". In: *Philosophers' Imprint* 8.2, pp. 1–22

Amia Srinivasan (2015). "Are We Luminous?" In: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 90.2, pp. 294–319

### Optional Readings

Chapter 4 of Timothy Williamson (2000). *Knowledge and Its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Chapter 4 of Brie Gertler (2011). *Self-Knowledge*. London: Routledge

## Topic 7: A Priori Knowledge

### Essay Question

*How, if at all, is a priori knowledge possible?*

## Core Readings

Chapter 4 of Laurence Bonjour (1997). *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of A Priori Justification*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

C.S. Jenkins (2008). “A Priori Knowledge: Debates and Developments”. In: *Philosophy Compass* 3.3, pp. 436–450

## Optional Readings

Hartry Field (2005). “Recent Debates About the A Priori”. In: *Oxford Studies in Epistemology, Volume 1*. Ed. by Tamar Gendler and John Hawthorne. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Chap. 3, pp. 69–88

John Hawthorne (2002). “Deeply Contingent A Priori Knowledge”. In: *Philosophy and phenomenological research* 65.2, pp. 247–269

Timothy Williamson (2013). “How Deep Is the Distinction between A Priori and A Posteriori Knowledge?” In: *The A Priori in Philosophy*. Ed. by Albert Casullo and Joshua C. Thurow. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chap. 13, pp. 291–312

## Topic 8: Disagreement

### Essay Question

*Can two epistemic peers with the same evidence rationally disagree?*

## Core Readings

Adam Elga (2010). “How to Disagree about How to Disagree”. In: *Disagreement*. Ed. by Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chap. 7, pp. 175–186

John Hawthorne and Amia Srinivasan (2013). “Disagreement Without Transparency: Some Bleak Thoughts”. In: *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays*. Ed. by David Christensen and Jennifer Lackey. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 9–30

## Optional Readings

Earl Conee (2010). “Rational Disagreement Defended”. In: *Disagreement*. Ed. by Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chap. 4, pp. 69–90

David Christensen (2007). “Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News”. In: *The Philosophical Review* 116.2, pp. 187–217

Jennifer Lackey (2010). “A Justificationist View of Disagreement’s Epistemic Significance”. In: *Social Epistemology*. Ed. by Adrian Haddock, Alan Millar, and Duncan Pritchard. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chap. 15, pp. 298–325

# METAPHYSICS

## Topic 9: Causation

### Essay Question

*What's the best analysis of causation?*

### Core Readings

Laurie A. Paul (2009). "Counterfactual Theories". In: *The Oxford Handbook of Causation*. Ed. by Helen Beebe, Christopher Hitchcock, and Peter Menzies. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chap. 8, pp. 158–184

J. L. Mackie (1965). "Causes and Conditions". In: *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2.4, pp. 245–264

Michael Baumgartner (2009). "Interdefining Causation and Intervention". In: *Dialectica* 63.2, pp. 175–194

### Optional Readings

Helen Beebe (2004). "Causing and Nothingness". In: *Causation and Counterfactuals*. Ed. by John Collins, Ned Hall, and Laurie A. Paul. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Chap. 11, pp. 291–308

David Lewis (1979). "Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow". In: *Noûs* 13.4, pp. 455–476

David Lewis (1986a). *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell

David Lewis (2000). "Causation as Influence". In: *The Journal of Philosophy* 97.4, pp. 182–197

David Lewis (2004). "Void and Object". In: *Causation and Counterfactuals*. Ed. by John Collins, Ned Hall, and Laurie A. Paul. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Chap. 10, pp. 277–290

## Topic 10: Possible Worlds

### Essay Question

*'If possible worlds are needed to explain modality, it is better not to explain modality'.  
Do you agree?*

### Core Readings

Philip Bricker (2008). "Concrete Possible Worlds". In: *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Ed. by Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne, and Dean W. Zimmerman. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Chap. 3.1, pp. 169–204

Joseph Melia (2008). "Ersatz Possible Worlds". In: *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Ed. by Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne, and Dean W. Zimmerman. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Chap. 3.2, pp. 205–228

### Optional Readings

Chapter 1–3 of David Lewis (1986a). *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell

Robert C. Stalnaker (1976). “Possible Worlds”. In: *Noûs* 10.1, pp. 65–75

Takashi Yagisawa (2010). *Worlds and Individuals: Possible and Otherwise*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

## Topic 11: The Passage of Time

### Essay Question

*Why does time, but not space, seem to pass?*

### Core Readings

J. Ellis. McTaggart (1908). “The Unreality of Time”. In: *Mind* 17.4, pp. 457–474

Judith Jarvis Thomson (2001). “McTaggart on Time”. In: *Noûs* 35.15, pp. 229–252

### Optional Readings

Michael Dummett (1960). “A Defence of McTaggart’s Proof of the Unreality of Time”. In: *Philosophical Review* 69.4, pp. 497–504

Donald C. Williams (1951). “The Myth of Passage”. In: *Journal of Philosophy* 48.15, pp. 457–472

Eric T. Olson (2009). “The Rate of Time’s Passage”. In: *Analysis* 69.1, pp. 3–9

Josh Parsons (2002). “A-Theory for B-Theorists”. In: *Philosophical Quarterly* 52.206, pp. 1–20

## Topic 12: Past and Future Objects

### Essay Question

*In what sense, if any, do past objects exist?*

### Core Readings

Arthur Prior (1998). “The Notion of the Present”. In: *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*. Ed. by Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman. 1st ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Chap. 7, pp. 80–82, (Content warning: mention of sexual violence)

Kristie Miller (2017). “Presentness, Where Art Thou? Self-Locating Belief and the Moving Spotlight”. In: *Analysis* 77.4, pp. 777–788

David Braddon-Mitchell (2004). “How Do We Know It Is Now Now?” In: *Analysis* 64.3, pp. 199–203

### Optional Readings

Peter Forrest (2004). “The Real but Dead Past: A Reply to Braddon-Mitchell”. In: *Analysis* 64.4, pp. 358–362

Chris Heathwood (2005). “The Real Price of the Dead Past: A Reply to Forrest and to Braddon-Mitchell”. In: *Analysis* 65.3, pp. 249–251

Daniel Deasy (2015). “The Moving Spotlight Theory”. In: *Philosophical Studies* 172.8, pp. 2073–2089

## Topic 13: Persistence

### Essay Question

*'Flooding a sandcastle destroys the castle, but not the sand. So the castle and the sand are two different things'. Discuss.*

### Core Readings

Michael B. Burke (1992). "Copper Statues and Pieces of Copper: A Challenge to the Standard Account". In: *Analysis* 52.1, pp. 12–17

Judith Jarvis Thomson (1998). "The Statue and the Clay". In: *Noûs* 32.2, pp. 149–173

### Optional Readings

Mark Johnston (1992). "Constitution is Not Identity". In: *Mind* 101.401, pp. 89–106

Harold W. Noonan (1993). "Constitution is Identity". In: *Mind* 102.405, pp. 133–146

Laurie A. Paul (2002). "Logical Parts". In: *Noûs* 36.4, pp. 578–596

Delia Graff Fara (2012). "Possibility Relative to a Sortal". In: *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*. Ed. by Karen Bennett and Dean W. Zimmerman. Vol. 7. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 2–40

## Topic 14: Mereology

### Essay Question

*Under what conditions, if any, do material objects compose?*

### Core Readings

Chapters 2 and 3 of Peter Van Inwagen (1990). *Material Beings*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press

Chapter 4, especially section 9, of Theodore Sider (2001). *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time*. Oxford: Clarendon Press

Theodore Sider (1993). "Van Inwagen and the Possibility of Gunk". In: *Analysis* 53.4, pp. 285–289

### Optional Readings

Ned Markosian (1998). "Brutal Composition". In: *Philosophical Studies* 92.3, pp. 211–249

David Rose and Jonathan Schaffer (2017). "Folk Mereology is Teleological". In: *Noûs* 51.2, pp. 238–270

Jonathan Tallant (2014). "Against Mereological Nihilism". In: *Synthese* 191.7, pp. 1511–1527

Jonathan Schaffer (2010). "Monism: The Priority of the Whole". In: *The Philosophical Review* 119.1, pp. 31–76

Cian Dorr and Gideon Rosen (2002). "Composition as a Fiction". In: *The Blackwell Guide to Metaphysics*. Ed. by Richard Gale. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 151–174

Ross P. Cameron (2007). “The Contingency of Composition”. In: *Philosophical Studies* 136.1, pp. 99–121

Gabriel Uzquiano (2004). “Plurals and Simples”. In: *The Monist* 87.3, pp. 429–451

## Topic 15: Personal Identity

### Essay Question

*Would you survive teletransportation? Does your answer change in the case where two copies of you emerge?*

### Core Readings

Derek Parfit (1971). “Personal Identity”. In: *The Philosophical Review* 80.1, pp. 3–27

Bernard Williams (1970). “The Self and the Future”. In: *The Philosophical Review* 79.2, pp. 161–180

Katherine Hawley (2005). “Fission, Fusion and Intrinsic Facts”. In: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 71.3, pp. 602–621

### Optional Readings

Derek Parfit (2016). “We are not Human Beings”. In: *Animalism: New Essays on Persons, Animals and Identity*. Ed. by Stefan Blatti and Paul F. Snowdon. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chap. 2, pp. 31–49

David Lewis (1986b). “Survival and Identity (including postscript)”. In: *Philosophical Papers: Volume I*. Oxford University Press. Chap. 5, pp. 55–77

Theodore Sider (1996). “All the world’s a stage”. In: *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74.3, pp. 433–453

## Topic 16: Properties

### Essay Question

*Do properties exist? If so, what kinds of things are they?*

### Core Readings

Chapter 1 of David M. Armstrong (1989). *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction*. Boulder, CO: Westview

Chris Daly (1994). “Tropes”. In: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 94.1, pp. 253–261

Anna-Sofia Maurin (2015). “States of Affairs and the Relation Regress”. In: *The Problem of Universals in Contemporary Philosophy*. Ed. by Gabriele Galluzzo and Michael J. Loux. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 195–214

## Optional Readings

Chapter 1 of W. V. O. Quine (1980). *From a Logical Point of View: 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays*. 2nd. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Frank P. Ramsey (1925). “Universals”. In: *Mind* 34.136, pp. 401–417

Peter Simons (1994). “Particulars in Particular Clothing: Three Trope Theories of Substance”. In: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54.3, pp. 553–575

Jerrold Levinson (2006). “Why There Are No Tropes”. In: *Philosophy* 81.4, pp. 563–580